

A Grande Crisis: Brad Ritter quoted by Nation's Restaurant News on Starbucks' social media hoax.

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Starbucks was just about to launch its light-roast Blonde Espresso nationwide when the chain was forced into damage control over a hoax about one of its Atlanta locations.

A fraudulent post by a woman pretending to be a Starbucks employee appeared on Twitter. She claimed to be tainting white people's orders at the coffee house. The post quickly spread, and Starbucks closed the restaurant for a day.

It reopened the following morning, after Starbucks quickly tweeted that the post was false and that the chain had no employee with the name used in the fraudulent post.

The response illustrates what crisis communications expert Brad Ritter said is the key to managing such situations: the three 'C's of control, concern and communication. Communicate that you're handling the situation, you're concerned about the welfare of your customers, and you're working with the proper authorities or anyone else who can help address the problem.

Demonstrating that you're taking action is critical, Ritter said. The response should be immediate, even if it's simply saying you're aware of a potential problem, working diligently to learn more, and will share information as you get it.

With social media outbreaks, Ritter said, try to contain it to one form of social media. If it starts on Twitter, keep it there. The sooner you say something, even if it's general, the better. Some people incessantly need to hit the "share" button, he said, and if you don't immediately act to prevent that, you'll be in trouble.

Excessive caution can be a problem in these situations, often causing trouble for brands. Because they don't have information or the facts, Ritter said, they don't say or do anything, and the damage gets out of control.

However, make sure that whatever you say, no matter how general, is accurate. Misinformation that has to be corrected after the fact is very damaging to the brand's reputation, Ritter said.

Read the full story at <http://www.nrn.com/marketing/crisis-averted-starbucks-avoids-social-media-meltdown-atlanta-hoax>

